



APPLE BUTTER GANG

What is it??

Today it consists of about 50-60 persons who annually meet at the Church each Fall to make about 500 gallons of prime-quality, old-fashioned apple butter over a 3-week period. And it is all made from scratch—starting with around 200 bushels of apples that have to be peeled, sliced and cooked. Peeling & slicing is done one day and the cooking is done the next, usually in 6 kettles and always over open wood fires. Yes, that makes for a long day, but it is a pleasant one, even when because of weather the kettles have to be cooked under roof at sheds in the Appalachian Fairground where the smoke tends to hang around. Pints and quarts are available, mostly determined by orders which start coming in for next year by the time this year's production is finished. The Gray UMC apple butter has become so popular that the majority of the jars are already sold before the making starts each year. Sugar-free and extra cinnamon orders are accommodated in addition to standard stuff.

How did this start?

You know what the news is, now for the rest of the story. Like many good ministries, this one began innocently enough with a group of friends who didn't start out to create what has resulted. In 1989, Patsy Neeley, Linda Hall, Carolyn Smith, Kelly Johnston, the Church pastor, Buddy Miller, and his wife Sally decided to make a kettle of apple butter from 3 bushels of apples and while tending to that, have someone teach Sally how to crochet in response to her request. From there, annual making continued as part of several Fall Fests held at the Church, and just grew from there to the point where over the years, 27,000 jars have been made. In 1990, the Apple Butter Gang voted to donate all proceeds from apple butter sales to the Church Building Fund, and through 2008, \$155,500 has been donated to that fund. In addition, this group makes a huge pot of vegetable soup for the Church's Halloween Trunk or Treat event where kids from all over the community can come to safely participate in trick or treat and kids and adults alike can enjoy a meal and a costume contest.

But Wait, There's More

In addition to being a wonderful way to create substantial benefits for the church in paying off debt and providing persons all over the U.S. with the very best apple butter, this ministry has also evolved into a strong fellowship where friends get to

spend several days over a 4 week period working together, eating together, sharing concerns and ministering to one another and generally having good Christian fun. Even more, in recent years, this fellowship has ministered to men who have gotten into trouble, but who, as trustees, work at the Appalachian Fairgrounds. Each week during apple butter season, the Apple Butter Gang works with, eats with, and shares with these men and their law enforcement escorts on apple butter work days. In addition, once a quarter, the Apple Butter Gang prepares and serves a meal to these men at the church.